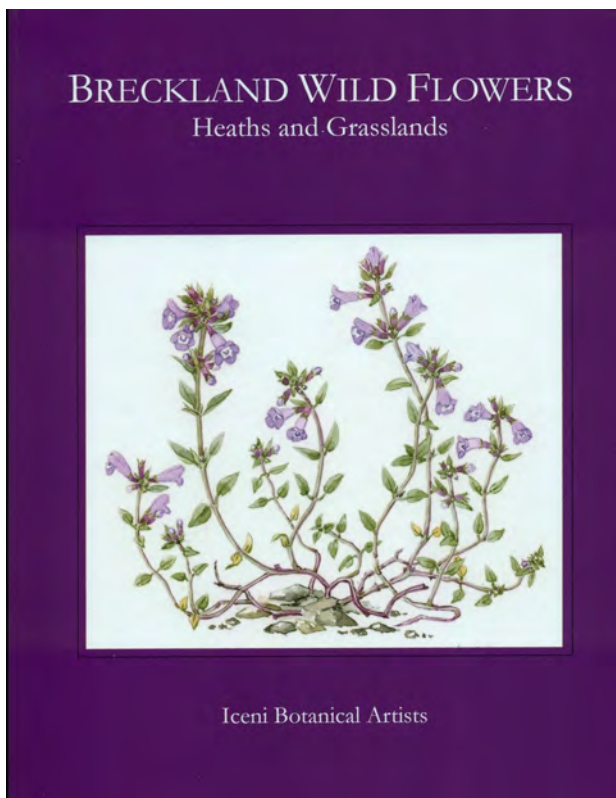


## SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF BRECKLAND WILDFLOWER BOOK

*The last week of January saw the launch at Brandon Country Park of the book Breckland Wild Flowers: Heaths and Grasslands, published by the Icení Botanical Artists as part of their wider project on Breckland flora. A grant of £1,000 from the Breckland Society helped make possible not only the book, but also a touring exhibition seen by thousands of people across East Anglia.*

By any standards this was a remarkable project and very ambitious in scope. The objective of the group of painters was to record the wildflowers of the Brecks, their impetus provided by the publication by UEA in 2010 of the UK Biodiversity Audit. It revealed that nearly one third of the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan



species are to be found in the Brecks, including 26 rare and endangered plant species. "Many members of the Icení Botanical Artists lived in or close-by to Breckland," writes the group's chair, Isobel Bartholomew, in her preface to the book, "and it seemed a natural and necessary project to take on."

Although photographs of Breckland floral species were (mostly) easy to find, there was no body of artistic work showing the plants with true attention to botanical detail. IBA artists therefore set about tracking down these species in the field. Most of the work was carried out in the early spring, starting in February, and regular checking of the optimal day on which to do

*/Cont'd on page 2*

### What's On

See [www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events](http://www.brecsoc.org.uk/news-and-events)

**Friday 24 February, 3pm**

**Visit to Foulden Water Mill**, courtesy of the owner, Robin Morrow. Robin will give a talk about the restoration prior to his purchase in 2004 and what he has done since then. You will have the opportunity of seeing the BBC programme showing the restoration work by Graham Martin.

Robin is a keen wildlife photographer. Living at the mill has enabled him to build hides and install perches to gain the best pictures from the resident wildlife population. He will show some of the animals that he has filmed in and around the mill.

Members free, non-members £3.

Booking essential, [secretary@brecsoc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@brecsoc.org.uk)

**9 March 2017, 10am–4pm**

**Sheep hurdle-making day**

See article on page 2. Venue to be confirmed.

For more information and/or to book a place, please email [sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com](mailto:sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com)

**Friday 21 April, 6.30pm**

**Guided visit to Narborough Bone Mill** led by Peter Goulding

A forgotten piece of Britain's agricultural and industrial history, Narborough Bone Mill ground bones – including whale bone from the Greenland Fishery and human bone imported from Germany – to be spread on Britain's fields as fertiliser.

This site is on private land in a beautiful riverside location and normally not accessible by the public, so this is a rare opportunity to see an unusual aspect of the local heritage.

Members free, non-members £3.

Please book in advance via [secretary@brecsoc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@brecsoc.org.uk)

For more information about Society events,  
please email [secretary@brecsoc.org.uk](mailto:secretary@brecsoc.org.uk)

Cont'd from page 1

the recording was essential if the artists were not to have to wait a further year to see a particular plant at its best. It was sometimes necessary to seek advice on precise plant identification and location at very short notice, combined with a network of phone calls to discover just which artist might be available to go out into the field at a moment's notice. The artists were assisted by local botanist Yvonne Leonard, who had some specimens growing in pots in her garden, invaluable for closer inspection under more favourable conditions.



Daphne Mezereum, painted by Christine Grey-Wilson

A total of 45 watercolours were produced during the project, with many shown in a touring exhibition which travelled to various venues in Cambridge, Norwich, Wymondham and Bury St Edmunds. The paintings are reproduced in all their magnificent glory in the new book, with supporting text by Dr Kit Grey-Wilson, a foreword by John Parker, Emeritus Professor at Clare Hall Cambridge, and an introduction to the Brecks by Society chairman James Parry. "We are thrilled and very grateful that the Breckland Society's grant has helped to make possible this landmark exhibition and publication," says Isobel Bartholomew. "For the first time, some of the most beautiful and endangered plants in the Brecks have been recorded through original paintings, and enjoyed by so many people through the exhibition and now this book."

## **SHEEP IN THE BRECKS UPDATE**

*Following a successful visit to Norfolk Record Office in November last year, the project volunteers have been scouring East Anglia's archives for evidence of the important role sheep have played in our area. There are some fascinating studies of Anglo-Saxon herders, the conflict between landowners and tenants, the difference between big manorial flocks designed to turn wool into gold and the smaller village-scale flocks which provided calories and some surplus money. Project manager Peter Goulding will soon begin preparing the report on the project's discoveries.*

No Breckland Society project would be complete without field visits, and volunteers have been visiting earthworks identifiable as medieval sheepfolds, sited on the Harling Drove and Icknield Way. These ancient tracks would have been essential for moving sheep to and from the medieval fairs, at which visiting merchants would trade with local villagers.

**Grazing Practitioners Day** Thursday 23 March 2017, 10am–4pm, run by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, at a Suffolk Wildlife Trust Reserve near Woodbridge in Suffolk. The day will give some hands-on experience of very basic sheep husbandry, aimed at conservation professionals, but may be of interest also to volunteers and rangers involved with sheep and conservation grazing. Attendance at the course will not be enough for you to call yourself a shepherd, but will involve real sheep and give an insight into the trials and tribulations of keeping sheep.

**Archaeology of Bones Training Day** Thursday 23 February 2017, 10am–3pm, run by Richard Hoggett.

What can bones tell us about the past? Dr Hoggett will explain the archaeological process and the role of bones within it, and give a detailed look at local Breckland case studies. With real bones!

**Booking for these is essential, please email [sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com](mailto:sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com)**

**Making a Sheep Hurdle** day — when volunteers will build a frame sheep hurdle out of ash wood — will be on 9 March and Peter hopes to confirm the venue very soon. Anyone interested should email [sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com](mailto:sheepinthebrecks@gmail.com) for more information.

## **RARE HERON VISITS THE BRECKS**

*One of Britain's largest waterbirds has made an appearance in the area, with a Great White Egret recently spotted at Lynford Pits near Mundford.*

The height of a Grey Heron, but pure white with a yellow beak and dark legs, the species was an exceptional visitor to British shores from its usual haunts in southern and eastern Europe until a decade or so ago. Since then, increasing numbers have been turning up and pairs have even started breeding in southern England. The arrival of the Great Whites comes in the wake of the invasion of Little Egrets that has swept much of the country in recent years. These can also be seen at Lynford, and can be distinguished from their larger cousin not just by size but by their black (rather than yellow) beak.

Meanwhile, adjacent Lynford Arboretum has been attracting hordes of birdwatchers lately, drawn by the roost there of Hawfinches. This shy and elusive bird is always hard to locate and see, but up to 60 or so are currently showing up at what is one of their main sites nationally.



Great White Egret *Ardea alba*

## LATEST NEWS FROM BRANDON COUNTRY PARK

*“The north wind doth blow and we shall have snow”—so the rhyme goes. The north wind has indeed blown, but we have had no snow—or not yet... But we have had plenty of frost! The start of the new year has indeed been bracing at Brandon Country Park.*

Winter is often a magical time here, with the sun shining bright and the park dusted in white ice crystals. Along our trails frost seems to decorate every twig and leaf, creating a winter wonderland. It’s a very photogenic time, with scores of camera-carrying visitors on woodland walks. This is very apt, as on 14 January the park held its very first Photography Workshop. Despite near freezing conditions, the event was a great success with visitors learning all about depth of field, F-stops and ISO ratings. Many more workshops are planned throughout the year.

The year has also begun well for business. Between Boxing Day and New Year’s Day the tearoom was bursting at the seams. That week often proves to be one of the busiest of the year as people escape the cabin fever and excesses of Christmas. It is also a time for New Year resolutions, doubtless reflected in the record numbers of participants turning out for the New Year’s Day Park Run! Over 220 runners padded their way around the forest on a 5km circuit, smashing the previous record number of runners by nearly 100.

For the team here, the start of the year is a useful time to reflect on the previous few months and plan for the year ahead. We had some wonderful moments in 2016. Forest Fest back in June saw over 800 people enjoy crafts, theatre and treasure trails. Open Air Cinema Nights were a new venture and well attended—more of these are planned for 2017. But our biggest event of the year was Enchanted Forest. On 26 August over 1200 people participated in woodland drumming, tree dressing, face painting and many other activities. It was a great day with happy faces all round. But it was a real test for the park team: directing car-parking, looking after visitors and managing a wide range of events. We learned a lot, which will help us plan and deliver events in 2017, including the great importance of hiring portaloos!

In October, Pumpkin Fest saw the Walled Garden turn into a masterclass of carving and a myriad of costumes as visitors



*Dressing up and pumpkin-carving in the Walled Garden*

created some wonderful and imaginatively carved pumpkins. It was also a great coming together of many community groups in Brandon, including Tesco, which not only helped out on the day but also provided over 120 pumpkins free of charge—thank you Tesco! In December our latest venture was Crafty Christmas. Visitors made Christmas tree decorations and lanterns from willow twigs, paper and leaves. As the sun went down and owls began to hoot, so children and adults carried their crafted lanterns on a trail through the woods. It was a really beautiful experience.

The year ahead has much to live up to, but plans are already afoot to repeat successes and introduce a few new ideas, some of which we are keeping under our hat—watch this space to see what we do!

*David Falk, Manager, Brandon Country Park*

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## THE LOST WATERMILL OF BUCKENHAM TOFTS

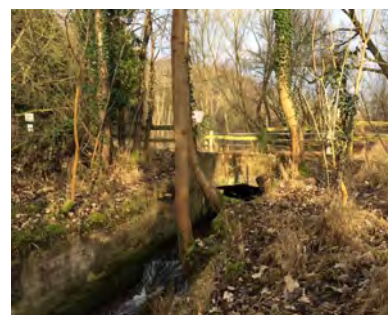
*The River Wissey rises near Shipdham and flows for over 30 miles south and west through the northern Brecks until it joins the Great Ouse at Fordham, just south of Downham Market. Historically it was an important trading route, and the Domesday reference to the Wissey states that it was navigable from Oxenburgh (present-day Oxborough) as far as King’s Lynn and Cambridge.*

There was a sizeable Medieval settlement on the river at Oxborough Ferry, and nearby Stoke Ferry became a prosperous village on the back of river trade. Much of the business was in corn and flour, and the river supported a network of watermills along its length.

One of these was Buckenham Tofts Mill, located south-east of Ickburgh. Manorial records reveal that there was a mill established here by at least 1667, when a series of repairs was carried out and a pair of new millstones installed. These were apparently transported by water to Brandon and then carted to the mill. The estate at Buckenham Tofts became one of the finest in the Brecks, boasting a substantial hall (built in the 1690s by London property developer Henry Vincent) with extensive gardens, pleasure grounds and parkland. Sadly, the house was pulled down after the Second World War and the remnants of the designed landscape are now part of the MOD Stanford Training Area.

Buckenham Tofts Mill ceased operation in 1928 and its buildings were mostly demolished in the years that followed. A site visit earlier this month by Society committee members James Parry, Liz Dittner and Peter Goulding revealed the presence of a gearwheel and ironwork dated 1840 (see top right). Peter, an experienced millwright, considers that the surviving wheelrace channel (see lower right)—there were once two channels, but only one now flows—may have supported two wheels, evidence of the scale of the operation. He also thinks that the ironwork may have been part of a turbine used to power a timber saw in the one surviving building, a long brick-and-flint shed which was later converted and used by Norfolk County Council as a youth field centre, but which is now sadly derelict.

Although clogged with vegetation and fallen trees, the site supports enough evidence to understand its former character and extent and, perhaps, to contemplate a future restoration? For more information about the mill and its history, see [www.norfolk Mills.co.uk/Watermills/buckenham-tofts.html](http://www.norfolk Mills.co.uk/Watermills/buckenham-tofts.html).



## RECENT EVENTS

### Ancestral Voices, Friday 13 January at Houghton Barns



Having travelled extensively in Europe, Daniel Defoe—perhaps best known for penning *Robinson Crusoe*—began a journey around the British Isles. Sarah Doig and Tony Scheuregger presented an account of his travels in 1722 through East Anglia, offering a fascinating portrayal of rural and maritime life in towns such as Ipswich and King's Lynn a few decades before the Industrial Revolution. Excerpts from Defoe's diaries were accompanied by music and songs. Between the two of them Sarah and John played two viols, a lute, a baroque guitar and a recorder.

We were delighted to see so many members at this event, in spite of the wintry weather, and hope to welcome back Sarah and John with another of their programmes before too long.

### Visit to Great Ellingham Observatory, Friday 25 November

A small group of 13 Society members was welcomed, on a very cold night, by the Breckland Astronomical Society. We were given a tour of the control room and telescope dome, followed by a demonstration of the Planetarium software—the Stellarium. We were fortunate that it was a clear evening, giving us superb views of the night sky.

Adjusting one's eyes to see the galaxies, billions of light years away, takes a bit of practice. The knack, apparently, is to focus on the outer regions of the retina, and the rod cells, the low light detectors, will pick up a faint glow at the edge of an area of darkness. We were also able to discern different stars of different colours.

The observatory in Great Ellingham is now part of the Dark Sky Discovery Site network—a nationwide network of places that provide great views and which are accessible to everyone.

Many thanks to the Breckland Astronomical Society, who were extremely welcoming and hospitable, and gave us a most interesting evening.



Members of the Breckland Astronomical Society

## ST PETER'S CHURCH, ICKBURGH: A BRECKLAND GEM

*Tucked away along a no-through road on the eastern edge of Ickburgh sits the church of St Peter. The village was described lyrically by Arthur Mee in his 1940 book The King's England—Norfolk: "Thatched cottages, charming with creepered walls and flowers are strung along a byway, ending at the church and the almshouses." Over 75 years later, Ickburgh has been rather compromised by less than picturesque modern housing, but the church remains unspoilt and in a setting still largely defined by fields and Breckland views.*

The oldest part of the building is the tower, which probably dates to 1370 or thereabouts. The rest of the Medieval church was largely in ruins by the time antiquarian Tom Martin came this way in 1741, for he lamented that it was "kept in a very indecent condition, and ill-becoming a place set apart for the worship of almighty God." Salvation, at least in an architectural sense, did not prove possible until 1865–66, when Francis, 3rd Baron Ashburton (who owned Didlington Hall, a few miles west) paid for the rebuilding of the church to designs produced by RM Phipson, the diocesan architect. Lord Ashburton's family name was Baring, and this explains the incorporation of carved bears either side of the main door and the appearance of bear heads in the exquisite stained glass (see right), all Victorian and one of the church's most striking features.

The glass is believed to be by Heaton, Butler and Bayne, a very well-regarded firm based in London's Covent Garden and whose work appears in Westminster Abbey and Peterborough Cathedral. In addition to a series of windows devoted to the saints, there are also many leaded panes containing charming depictions of agricultural subjects and implements, from pitchforks and shepherds' crooks to bee skeps and heads of wheat. Some of the best examples are to be found in the attractive flint-and-timber porch, and stand as testament to the rural character of this once remote settlement.



If you would like to contribute to the Breckland Society Newsletter, please contact the Editor by email: [liz@dittner.co.uk](mailto:liz@dittner.co.uk), or tel 01366 727813